Chapter 10

Continuous Improvement in e-Teams for Collaborative Marketing Planning

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ABSTRACT

Academics are charged with continuous and evidence-based curriculum improvement in a move toward more learner-centred teaching and assessment, whereby information and communication technologies increasingly facilitate this call. This chapter looks at technology enhanced teaching and learning in a university curriculum innovation. A major collaborative marketing plan assessment was designed to be undertaken in virtual or eteams in a compulsory first-year Marketing unit within a Bachelor of Business course. Using the Plan-Do-Study-Act improvement cycle, the efficacy of teamwork is evaluated for two successive delivery periods in 2011. Improvements to the eteam design are identified and implemented. It is found that external students can successfully conceptualise new products and develop marketing plans in a fully online learning environment. Further, with the improved eteam design, initial results suggest that teamwork is shifting from simply cooperative to genuinely collaborative.

INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector around the world is changing at an increasingly fast pace. Leaner and meaner universities are fighting for a greater slice of a more heterogeneous and widening student marketplace in the face of declining public funding and fiercer global competition. Students are paying more fees, and the emphasis on assurance of learning goals is growing. National policies regulate qualifications in education and training (e.g. Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2011) and demonstrated achievement of graduate competency standards is required within disciplines (e.g. Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, 2007) and professional bodies. Higher education providers, therefore, are relying more upon offering high quality, satisfaction-creating service experiences to remain competitive within the sector.

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If learning experiences are to be more satisfying, personal and engaging, a new teaching approach is needed – one that shifts the role of the educator from the giver of information to facilitator of student learning. An approach which fits the bill is learning-centred teaching (or learning-centredness). It emphasises the person who is doing the learning (Weimar, 2002) as well as the process of learning (Blumberg, 2009). Learning centredness uses a variety of methods to move beyond traditional teaching as transmission of knowledge.

A key factor in the transition to more quality, learning-centred environments in higher education overall is, of course, the dynamic suite of information and communication technologies (ICT). ICT facilitate the implementation of lifelong learning, while also evoking the need for lifelong learning (Golinsky, 2012). At the International Association for the Development of an Information Society (IADIS) in Berlin, Garcia and Secades (2012) noted that “the emerging information society forces us to rethink essential components of the educational process: from the basic training of teachers in ICT, how to teach and how to learn” (p. 543). The authors acknowledge that this takes time and needs to be progressive and planned. But as university education becomes accessible to a greater number of people, satisfactory educational experiences need to be delivered fast, especially for first-year students. They must be inspired, supported and develop a sense of belonging, not only for retention but also as a foundation for later year learning success and a lifetime of professional practice (Kift, Nelson, & Clarke, 2010). The need for action is most acute in relation to first-year students enrolled in distance or external mode, toward success in tertiary education.

The curriculum-related aspects of a course or program are an important element in creating and delivering a ‘total educational experience’ (Ivy, 2008). This chapter looks at the use of ICT to facilitate a major curriculum innovation in a first-year marketing subject which aims to provide a higher quality, more enriching learning experience. It illustrates how virtual teams or eteams associated with a major assessment were continuously improved over two successive teaching periods. The main outcomes from implementing the design for external students during the first offering in Session 2, 2011 are described and provide the foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the innovation during the subsequent Session 3, 2011 offering. Some suggested improvements to the assessment design for the next offering (in Session 2, 2012) are outlined and interim results provided. Procedures to facilitate group work in the online environment are highlighted.

**BACKGROUND**

The idea to enhance student learning is usually the start of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), which is a process that unfolds over time (Trigwell, 2012). A widely used method for continuous process improvement, such as curriculum development, is the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model for improvement shown in Figure 1. Originally developed by Shewhart (1939) as a ‘dynamic scientific process of acquiring knowledge’, it was modified by Deming (2000) into what is known as the PDSA cycle used to obtain knowledge, develop changes, test changes, and to implement changes. This basic theoretical framework guided the curriculum innovation and evaluation process in relation to eteams, as is detailed later in this chapter.

**The Need for Sustainable Collaborative Assessment**

Described as the *de facto* curriculum (Rowntree, 1977), effective assessments provide a stimulus for learning (Dean & Cowley, 2009; Lizzio & Wilson, 2004). They are also a means to ensure achievement of intended learning outcomes (Houghton, 2004). Both are important in the contemporary
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